

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 5069

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TAGS: PGOV, CA
SUBJ: TRUDEAU ADVANCES LITTLE NEW POLICY ON QUEBEC IN
DEC 26 TV INTERVIEW

REF: REF A OTTAWA 5056; REF B OTTAWA 5034

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: RESPONDING TO HOUR-LONG TOUGH,
LEADING QUESTIONS ON QUEBEC DURING DEC 26 TV INTER-
VIEW, PM TRUDEAU ARTICULATED LITTLE IF ANY NEW
FEDERAL POLICIES. RATHER, HE STEADFASTLY MAINTAINED
THAT LIBERAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES OF THE PAST,
PARTICULARLY "INSTITUTIONAL BILINGUALISM", REMAINED
THE BASIS ON WHICH HE WILL LEAD FEDERAL FORCES
AGAINST THE SEPARATIST THREAT. THE TEST, HE ASSERTED,
WILL BE WHETHER CANADIANS WILL ACCEPT AND
MAKE THESE WORK AS THE PRICE OF KEEPING THE COUNTRY
TOGETHER. END SUMMARY.

2. TV INTERVIEWER BRUCE PHILLIPS SPENT MAJOR PART
OF HOUR-LONG DECEMBER 26 INTERVIEW ATTEMPTING TO FORCE
TRUDEAU ADMISSION THAT PAST POLICIES OF THE
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN LESS THAN SUCCESS-
FUL. TRUDEAU REFUSED TO CONCEDE THIS. RATHER,
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HE POINTED TO POOR ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, E.G., IN-
FLATION FED BY OIL PRICES, "SOMETIMES AN ERRONEOUS
APPLICATION OF THE BILINGUAL LAW," AND RACIAL
IRRITANTS LIKE LAST SPRING'S AIR CONTROLLERS'
STRIKE AS CERTRIFUGAL FORCES DAMAGING TO NATIONAL
UNITY. BUT HE INSISTED THAT BASIC FEDERAL PROGRAMS,

PARTICULARLY "INSTITUTIONAL BILINGUALISM", HAD NOT BEEN A FAILURE AND WOULD CONTINUE AS BASIC POLICY IN THE FUTURE. "I STILL BELIEVE THAT THE KIND OF POLICIES THAT WE'VE BEEN PUTTING TOGETHER IN THEIR ECONOMIC DIMENSION, OF GREATER EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE LESS DEVELOPED REGIONS OF CANADA, IN THEIR CULTURAL DIMENSION IN TERMS OF RESPECTING THAT THERE ARE TWO BASIC LANGUAGES IN CANADA AND THAT BOTH SHOULD HAVE OFFICIAL STATUS IN THE FEDERAL INSTITUTION, THAT THE PROVINCES THEMSELVES WHERE THERE ARE SUBSTANTIAL MINORITIES OF EITHER FRENCH OR ENGLISH SPEAKING CANADIANS SHOULD BE DOING MUCH MORE TO RESPECT THAT PARTICULAR IDENTITY - THESE TO ME ARE STILL THE SOLUTIONS."

3. SINCE TRUDEAU REJECTED PREMISE OF FUNDAMENTAL FLAWS IN ONGOING FEDERAL POLICY, HE WOULD NOT BE DRAWN OUT ON POSSIBLE NEW COURSES OF ACTION. SPECIFICALLY, HE REJECTED A SIGNIFICANTLY LOOSER CONFEDERATION AS A VIABLE OPTION. HE DID, HOWEVER, LEAVE SOME ROOM FOR A POSSIBLE RESTRUCTURING OF POWER BETWEEN FED AND PROV GOVERNMENTS. "IT DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN'T HAVE A CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE WHERE WE GIVE MORE POWER TO THE PROVINCES IN SOME AREA, PROVIDING THEY WERE TO GIVE MORE POWER TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN SOME OTHER AREAS. YOU KNOW, I'M NOT SAYING WE SHOULDN'T UPDATE THE FEDERALISM. I'M JUST SAYING THAT I DON'T FOR ONE BELIEVE THAT

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THE SOLUTION TO SEPARATISM IS A LOOSER CONFEDERATION. THAT'S ALL I'M SAYING, AND LET PEOPLE CHOOSE THE LEADER THEY WANT TO FOLLOW."

4. WHEN ASKED ABOUT WHAT ENGLISH-CANADIANS CAN DO TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR SUPPORT OF CONFEDERATION, TRUDEAU RESPONDED IN VAGUE, GENERAL TERMS. "WHAT CAN THE REST OF CANADA DO TO MEET THE PARTICULAR QUESTION OF CONFEDERATION? OF COURSE I HAVE VIEWS ON THAT. I'VE BEEN TRYING TO SELL THEM TO CANADIANS FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS NOW. I HAVE AN APPROACH TO NATIONAL UNITY WHICH GOES ABOUT LIKE THIS. IF WE WANT QUEBECERS TO REMAIN IN CANADA, WE HAVE TO MAKE THAT COUNTRY A DESIRABLE PLACE FOR THEM TO LIVE, AND THIS MEANS NOT ONLY DESIRABLE FROM AN ECONOMIC POINT OF VIEW, WHICH IT MUST BE FOR ALL OF US, BUT IT ALSO MEANS DESIRABLE FROM THE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL POINT OF VIEW AND THAT MEANS THAT THEY MUST BE

ABLE TO FEEL THAT THEY CAN FULFILL THEMSELVES IN A CULTURAL SENSE, IN A HUMAN SENSE, BETTER IN CANADA THAN THEY COULD IN A SEPARATE QUEBEC." HE DID NOT , HOWEVER, GO BEYOND THESE GENERALITIES.

5. TRUDEAU CONCEDED THAT PQ VICTORY IN QUEBEC HAD INCREASED THE THREAT OF POSSIBLE SEPARATISM SINCE THE PQ NOW HAS THE ELEMENTS OF POWER TO EDUCATE THE QUEBEC POPULATION. "THAT PARTY HAS NOW THE POWER AND. . .BEING IN POWER IS OBVIOUSLY A MUCH EASIER WAY TO PEDDLE YOUR WARES." BUT HE ADDED THAT THE PQ VICTORY WAS NOT WITHOUT SOME BENEFIT SINCE IT NOW REMOVES THE UNCERTAINTIES OF THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS AND FORCES CANADIANS TO MAKE A CHOICE ON CONFEDERATION.

6. DISCUSSING A POSSIBLE QUEBEC REFERENDUM, TRUDEAU REPEATED HIS EARLIER CLAIM THAT HE WOULD NOT USE CONFIDENTIAL

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FEDERAL FORCE TO KEEP QUEBEC IN CONFEDERATION IF QUEBEC "OVERSHELMINGLY" WANTS TO SEPARATE. HE WARNED, HOWEVER, THAT VIOLENCE COULD ARISE IF RACIAL ANIMOSITY BECAME SUFFICIENTLY ACUTE AND POINTED TO LEBANON, CYPRUS, NORTHER IRELAND AND BANGLADESH AS EXAMPLES. MOVING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, HOWEVER, TRUDEAU SUGGESTED THAT THERE MIGHT NOT EVEN BE A REFERENDUM IN QUEBEC IF THE PQ IS CONVINCED THAT IT WOULD FAIL.

7. COMMENT: TRUDEAU PERFORMANCE WAS HARDLY INSPIRING FOR THOSE CANADIANS WHO ARE LOOKING FOR NEW FEDERAL POLICY TO COUNTER QUEBEC SEPARATIST THREAT. PHILLIPS'S REPEATED ATTEMPTS TO DRAW OUT TRUDEAU ON NEED FOR NEW DIRECTIONS WERE REPRESENTATIVE OF THIS FEELING AND TRUDEAU'S REBUFS INDICATED THAT HE IS NOT YET WILLING TO RECOGNIZE PUBLICLY THE NEED FOR CHANGE. AS REPORTED IN REF B, TRUDEAU IS STUDYING OPTIONS FOR POSSIBLE NEW COURSES OF ACTION INCLUDING DECENTRALIZATION BUT THE DEC 26 INTERVIEW INDICATED CLEARLY THAT HIS PRESENT TACTIC IS TO DEFEND STUBBORNLY PAST POLICY AND TO PROPOSE MORE OF THE SAME. DUEMLING

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